



Careaway

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Dear Department of Social Services,

I am writing to express my deep concerns about the proposed lists of included and excluded NDIS supports which may affect the services we offer.

Careaway Tours Australia Pty Ltd is a small home-based family company that has been in operation for over 30 years. We provide assisted holidays for adults with varying disabilities. Careaway Tours Australia Pty Ltd has been offering a wide variety of holidays with local, interstate & overseas holidays and cruises. Most of our business is repeat business.

When the NDIS was introduced, we adapted our business model to meet the requirements, and despite the COVID setbacks have successfully operated taking hundreds of people on holidays.

As providers of services to the disability sector prior to the NDIS we have witnessed changes such as improved options for people with a disability and the influx of other providers into this market. Nevertheless, our experience has held us in good stead.

We are now confronted with the prospect of not being able to offer holidays to our NDIS participants. This is distressing for our participants and affects our continued existence.

Careaway has extensive experience in organising accessible travel for people with disabilities. We arrange for suitable accommodation, transportation, and activities to ensure that NDIS participants can fully participate in their chosen travel experiences.

While there are other companies and travel agents that provide general travel services, they do not have the experience or knowledge required to provide holiday options with the appropriate supports for people with disabilities.

The supports offered on a Careaway holiday are similar to those supports offered in a respite house but are enriched by being taken in a different location with a new environment and new experiences. During a Careaway holiday we provide personal care, accommodation, meals- following meal time management plans, medication management, budgeting and money management, support to participate in the community.

These holidays provide respite for both the participants and their carers as well as having social and community participation. This may help to maintain current living situations by giving the participants and other supports a break.

Careaway provides opportunities for participants to engage in new experiences, develop new skills, and to build their confidence and independence. This can help participants achieve their goals relating to social and community participation, personal development, and building life skills.

Careaway support staff are trained both as seasoned travellers and also to provide individualised support and guidance to participants, helping them to navigate new environments, activities, and to build their capacity to manage their disability in new and challenging situations.

Careaway holidays allow the participants to undertake socially and economically beneficial activities within the wider community. During the trip, participants have the opportunity to engage in social activities, manage their travel budget, meet new people, and build social connections with others who share similar interests and experiences, which is a great way to build friendships and support networks. This can help to reduce social isolation and improve the participant's overall health and well-being. Many of our participants create new friendships and we see them return together for years to come.

Careaway holidays are aligned with current good practice in disability support and travel. Careaway employs trained and experienced support staff who are knowledgeable in person-centred disability support and travel, ensuring participants' safety, comfort and enjoyment throughout the trip.

Careaway provides reasonable and necessary supports that add to the support provided by families, carers, and the community. The provision of a holiday with Careaway is based on providing the level of support required for the participant to achieve their goals while ensuring that the participant's family, carers, and the community are not unduly burdened or disadvantaged.

Careaway provides value for money as it provides a unique service for NDIS participants that cannot be achieved through other forms of support, such as in-home care or day programs, making it a cost-effective option for NDIS participants. Careaway provides transparency in our pricing. We use the NDIS price guide as a base to calculate costs of supports and work closely with participants and their support persons to ensure their funding is used effectively.

On feedback from our participants we have been encouraged to know that participants and their carers prefer to have "respite" on a holiday rather than in a respite home. This is partially driven by value for money together with the participants satisfaction.

Non-specialised holiday providers have not made reasonable adjustments under anti-discrimination laws to provide the level of support required for people with disabilities to access and enjoy travel experiences without support. Therefore, the NDIS funding for a holiday may be the most appropriate way to ensure that participants receive the necessary support to fully participate in their chosen travel experience. Holidays have no other government funding associated with them.

The view that participants can save their money to pay for their own travel is unrealistic. People with a disability have a minimum wage starting at below \$3.00 per hour, it would be impossible with this level of income to afford a holiday let alone a supported holiday. Most other worker receive

holiday pay and time off work that is deemed necessary for their wellbeing. Why should people with a disability be further discriminated against?

I urge you to review the lists and instead work closely with people with disability to develop a more flexible, person-centred approach to defining reasonable and necessary supports, before making any further changes to the NDIS.

Any future guidance should empower participants to make choices that work for them, not restrict their options. There is still time to get this right, but it requires slowing down and truly listening to the disability community. Please do not rush through these damaging changes.

Travelling can be a fantastic way for NDIS participants to achieve their goals. The NDIS is all about giving people with disabilities more choice and control over their lives. Travel can help people to build confidence, independence and social connections.

We have asked our participants and their support persons why they think “holidays” are an essential service for them. Please find some of the responses below from a variety of our customers.

Kind Regards

Hannah Verity

Careaway Tours Australia Pty Ltd

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